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The ending "-ni," a productive morpheme which can be affixed to Swahili nouns, has been called the "locative" by most grammarians. While the author does not object to this term, he does not agree with Sacleux and Seidel, who call it a case. In some Indo-European and Altaic languages, the author argues, the locative is a case in the proper sense of the word. It is not, for example, a nominative or accusative. In other words, a noun in the locative case can never be used with subject or object function, only with adverbial function. Instances of the use of "-ni" as subject, object, and in prepositional and adverbial expressions are pointed out. (AMM)

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SOME NOTES ON THE LOCATIVE -NI IN SWAHILI

by Jan Knappert

1. The ending *–ni*, which can be affixed to Swahili nouns, has been called the locative by most grammarians[1]. There is no objections against this term, provided we realize that it is not a *case*, as Sacleux and Seidel call it [2]. In some Indo-European and Altaic languages, the locative is a case in the proper sense of the word, i.e. that it is not e.g. a nominative or accusative. In other words, a noun in the locative case can never be used with subject or object function, only with adverbial function. In Swahili however, we can say:

   chumbani kuna giza "There is darkness in the room," or, more literally: "The inside of the room has darkness." In English, we usually turn this around, and say: "It is dark in the room." placing the adverbial expression at the end, and anticipating it with "it" which does not refer to anything in particular.

   Apart from subject, as in the above example, the Swahili locative can be the object of a sentence:

   wakamwingia jumbani "They entered the palace."
   In this sentence, the objectival function of *jumbani* is shown by the object infix of class 18 *mw–*.

2. Which nouns can take the suffix *–ni?* Mrs. Ashton writes that "In Swahili nouns of all classes except the names of persons animals and places can take *–ni.*" Father Loogman writes that "appropriate nouns of any class" can take it, but we do not learn which nouns are appropriate[4]. Brauner[5] writes that all nouns can take it "except of course those of class 1." Hildegard Höftmann writes that "any substantive" can take it". None of these statements is entirely correct. It is true that placenames cannot have *–ni*. One says:

   Nakaa Mvita "I live in Mombasa." *–Ni* is impossible here. On the other hand, place names very often *are* locatives. *Kilindini, Kilimani, Kisangani* and many other place names are really locatives. These can also be formed from proper names, i.e. names of tribes, clans etc; e.g. *Uswahilini* "The Mohammedan Quarter"; *Arabuni* "Arabia", *Somalini* "Somaliland", *Uzunguni* "The Mission Station." Several names of countries fit in this category by coincidence: *Merikani* "The United States"; *Utaliani* "Italy", *Speni, Japani, Pakistani.* The occurrence of the word *wamishe* "missionaries" shows that the word *misheni* "mission" is felt to be a locative. The words *mahali, pahali* and *mwahali* cannot have the *–ni* suffix. The form *panajisini* "on a polluted place," shows that even adjectives with the *pa–* prefix can take *–ni.*

   Words that indicate time, like *kipindi, siku, usiku, wakati,* cannot have *–ni.* e.g.

   Tulisafiri usiku "We travelled by night"
   Wevi hutembea usiku "Thieves walk about in the night"
   Katika miaka ile "In those years"

   The form *mwakani* has a special meaning: "Within a year."

   The form *mwezini* means "On the moon." "In the month of November" is rendered: *Mnamo mwezi wa Novemba.*

   No preposition is required for dates: *Mwaka* 1885 "In the year 1885."

3. So far as I have been able to ascertain, all other nouns can take *–ni,* though admittedly it is rare with nouns of class1. It is possible, however, to say:
   mtuni "In man, in a human being."

   One would prefer to specify this by saying either:

   mwilini mwa mtu "In the human body" or:
   rohoni mwa mtu "In the human mind."

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According to Fr. Loogman, "it is not advisable to add *-ni* to words which already end in *-ni*[7]. This is incorrect.

I noted:
Muna ndege majanini "There are birds in the foliage."
k'ingia busitanini "When I entered the garden."

These two words are specifically mentioned by Fr. Loogman. The first example is from Mombasa, the second from a poem by Abu Bakari Lamui.

Plurals of all classes can take *-ni*.

watuni	"Among the people."
watu wa milimani	"Mountain—dwelling people."
maweni	"On the rocks" (a place name).
nzi imeanguka maziwani	"A fly has fallen into the milk."

If the plural is not expressed by means of a prefix in the noun, the plural prefix may be used with the *-a* of relationship, instead of the prefix of one of the place classes:

Nyumbani zangu	"In my houses."
nchini za ng'ambo	"In overseas countries."

Otherwise, the place-class prefix is preferred:

Mashambani kwangu	"On my fields."

A noun with locative *-ni* can define a preceding noun by mere juxtaposition:

matunda mikebeni	"Tinned fruits".
kazi maofisini	"Office work."

4. As one would expect, *-ni* is most frequently found with nouns denoting physical objects, including geographical places e g.:

kuna chuma ardhini	"There is iron in the earth."
nina tundu jinoni	"I have a hole in my tooth."
maji yamejaa kisimani	"The well is full of water."
mna maji nazini	"There is juice inside a coconut."
tia mafuta taani	"Put oil in the lamp."

The meaning of the noun does not have to be some physical object. The *-ni* suffix is often found with nouns that denote non-physical ideas, often with a conventionalized meaning:

tumo hatarini	"We are in danger."
hatiani	"Guilty"
usinitie dhambini	"Do not make me commit a sin."
yumo mashitakani	"He is involved in a law-suit."
mawazoni	"In thoughts."
mashakani	"In trouble."
salamani	"In good health."
hadharani	"In public".
kuingia masomoni	"To enter school, start classes."
na furaha mioyoni	"With joy in their hearts."[8]
kisani humu	"In this story."
maishani sijayaona	"As long as I live I have not yet seen them."
watahusika mgomoni	"They will be involved in the strike."
tembo linafika mauzoni	"The liquor is arriving on the place where it is sold'
maisha ya rohoni	"Spiritual life."

Sometimes a situation is indicated, rather than a place.

gizani	"In the dark."
tia samaki juani	"Put the fish in the sun (to dry)."

aherani "In the after-life."
jannani, peponi "In Paradise."
jahamuni, jahannamuni, motoni, narini "In Hell."

I found several abstract nouns in *u–* with *–ni:*
tangu ujanani wangu (sic) "Since my youth."
ukaribuni "In the near future."
walikaa ufukarani "They lived in poverty."
mafadha huishi utawani "The Fathers live in seclusion."
amejitia ujingani "He pretended ignorance."
amenisingizia wivini "He accused me behind my back of stealing".
ushenzini = *bila tabia nzuri*
ubahariani = *katika kazi ya baharia.*
ugomvini kanitoa[9] "He saved me from strife" (Ps.18,43).

5. The following meanings (i e "translation-meanings") have been noted for *–ni:*

1. IN, INSIDE In various shades of meaning:

a) *Inside:*
mtoto tumboni "A child *in utero.*"
mwituni, msituni "In the forest."
ngalawani "In the canoe."
b) *Mixed with:*
hunywa maziwa chaini "He drinks milk in his tea.'
mna chungu sukarini "There are ants in the sugar.".
c) *In referring to two-dimensional things:*
maua dirishani "Flowers in the window."
alingoja mlangoni "He waited in the doorway."
Samaki kiwa wavuni "Fish being in the net."[11]

2. ON, ON TOP OF *Nchani ya kanisa* (sic) "On top of the church."
na kukaa kileleni "He stood on the summit."[12]
ujenge nyumba mwambani "Build your house on a rock."[13]
Whether *on* or *in* is meant, depends on the context:
akapanda mlimani "He climbed onto the mountain."[14]
walipopanda chomboni "When they had climbed into the boat."[15]
usijenge mchangani "Do not build on sand."[16]
pesa zilizofichwa mchangani "Coins hidden in the sand."
hana nywele kichwani "He has no hair on his head."
jaza akili kichwani "Fill your head with good sense."[17]
alitia mafuta ya urembo nguoni "He put perfume on his clothes."
kiko nguoni mwako "It (the flea, *kiroboto*) is in your own clothes."[18]
(or: *Kanzuni*)
vyombo baharini "Boats on the ocean"
samaki baharini "Fish in the ocean."

AT: *Shuleni* "At school."
Mkutanoni "At the meeting."
Arusini "At the wedding." [19]

NEAR: *Rasini* "Near the cape." } Place names.
Kivukoni "Near the ferry." }

DURING *Safarini* "During the journey."
Mafujoni "During the riots."
Maishani mwake "During his life."
Amekufa vitani "He died during the war."

BETWEEN: *Sigareti mdomoni* "A cigarette between the lips."

BELONGING TO: *Joka la majini* "Water snake."

INTO: *Kuingia mjini* "To go into the town."

FROM, OUT OF: *Kutoka mjini* "To go out of the town."

THROUGH: *Apitaye mlangoni* "He that passes through the door." [20]

AMONG: *Mna ubovu viazini* "There are rotten ones among the potatoes."
Waliona pete ya mfalme samakini "They saw the ring of the king among the fishes."
Nyani huishi mitini "Baboons live in the trees, or: among the trees."
In the sense of "During" *-ni* can be used with the infinitive:
Kuzikani "During the burial."
Kuambiwani maneno haya alitulia "On being told these words he became quiet."
Kuregeani mjini kwake alishangaa kuona vitu vipya vingi "When he returned to his town he was surprised to see so many new things."

6. *-Ni* is used frequently in prepositional and adverbial expressions:
uwavuni mwa "Beside."

kushotoni kwake Bwana Fulani "On the left of Mr. So-and-so."
kukeni } *upande wa mama* (opp. *kuumeni*) "From mother's side."
machoni mwa "In the eyes of, before, in the presence of."
mikononi mwa "In the hands of, in the power of."
(also) *alitiwa nguvuni mwa polisi* "He was placed in the hands of the police, in the custody of..."
mwanzoni, mwishoni mwa Novemba "In the beginning, in the end of November"
miongoni mwa "Among".
kichwani kwa "At the head of."
ng'ambuni kwa bahari (or: *ng'ambu baharini*) "Beyond the lake."

7. *-Ni* is very much "alive", or in linguistic terms, it is still a productive morpheme. In other words, it is affixed to new words, mostly English words that have recently been accepted in the language.

amechukuliwa hadi hospitalini "She was taken to hospital."
amefikishwa kortini "He was brought to court."

pichani anaonekana Bwana Fulani "In the picture, we see Mr. X".[21]

1. Edward Steere, Swahili Handbook p. 59
Charles Sacleux, Grammaire des Dialectes Swahili, Paris 1909 p. 69.
2. Sacleux, op. cit. p. 77. A. Seidel, Suaheli Konversations—grammatik, Heidelberg 1900, p. 23.
3. Mrs. E. O. Ashton, Swahili Grammar (including intonation), p. 18.
4. Alfons Loogman, Swahili Grammar and Syntax, Pittsburgh 1965. p. 42.
5. Dr. S. Brauner & J. K. Bantu, Lehrbuch des Swahili, Leipzig 1964, p. 84.
6. Hildegard Höftmann & St. Mhando, Suaheli—Deutsches Wörterbuch, Leipzig 1963, p. 391; "...jedem beliebigen-Substantive..."
7. Loogman, op. cit. pp 42-3.
8. M. E. Mnyampala, Utenzi wa Enjili Takatifu, Dar es Salaam 1963, v. 471.
9. M. E. Mnyampala, Utenzi wa Zaburi, Ndanda 1966, p. 36.
10. Enjili, v. 422 11. ib. v. 415. 12. ib. 446.
13. ib. v. 392. 14. ib. v. 446. 15. ib. 422.
16. ib. v. 392 17. ib. v. 565.
18. cf. E. W. Taylor, African Aphorisms, London, 1891, No. 146.
19. Enjili v. 565. 20. ib. v. 847.
21. For more examples of *-ni* affixed to recent loanwords, see my "The Adaptation of Swahili to modern Times," *Afrika und Uebersee*, Band XLVIII, 1964, p. 185-6.